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SIPDIS

ROME PASS TO AMBASSADOR TONY HALL, MAX FINBERG,
AND TIM LAVELLE AT FODAG
STATE FOR AF/S

USAID FOR DCHA, OFDA, FFP AND AFR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Press Conference Briefing Notes for
Ambassador Tony Hall's visit to Zimbabwe,
October 8 - October 11, 2002

11. (U) The following offers briefing notes for
Ambassador Hall's press conference in Harare, Zimbabwe,
scheduled for Friday morning, 11 October 2002. The
press conference will be held at the conclusion of
Ambassador Hall's visit to Zimbabwe.

Goal of the Press Conference:

12. (U) The ideal headline the day after the press
conference would be along the following lines: "Food
Crisis Worsens - Hall Urges Policy Changes and More
International Support." We hope you can convey the
urgency you and the USG feel in addressing the crisis
and the critical importance of urgent GOZ accompanying
actions. The field trips you will take will give you
additional information to provide a real-life
perspective on the humanitarian crisis. Below is some
background information for the press briefing and
questions and answers on specific issues that may arise.

Scene Setter and Suggested Media Themes:

13. (U) The Press Conference will be held in the
auditorium of the Public Affairs Section's (PAS)
offices. PAS has separate offices from the Embassy and
is located in the city center near the Meikles Hotel.
We expect a minimum of 12 to 15 journalists. Ambassador
Hall and Ambassador Sullivan, will be seated at a draped
table in front of the black backdrop with the US and
Zimbabwean flags behind them. The press will be seated
in a semicircle facing the principals. The effect
sought is "conversational," that is, something less
formal than a stand-at-the-podium-style press
conference.

14. (U) The Public Affairs Officer, Bruce Wharton, will
introduce you (we will also distribute copies of your
bio) and you will be expected to make an opening
statement prior to taking questions. In your opening
statement, we suggest you speak about your field visits
and highlight the following themes:

- 1) Zimbabwe's food crisis is becoming increasingly
severe.
- 2) The Government of Zimbabwe should make policy
decisions to permit the private sector and a larger
number of NGOs to play a role in addressing the nation's
food needs.
- 3) Among the policy issues we believe are exacerbating
the food crisis are the Grain Marketing Board's monopoly
on grain imports and sales, unrealistically low price
controls on staple foods, ponderous bureaucratic
procedures for clearing donated food through Zimbabwean
customs, and limitations on the NGOs permitted to
participate in food distribution programs.
- 4) The United States has been the principal donor to
Zimbabwe's food crisis, with generous contributions also
coming from the United Kingdom and the European Union.
Additional assistance from other donors is needed to
meet Zimbabwe's food needs.
- 5) While Southern Africa's drought is a factor in the
food crisis, the Government of Zimbabwe needs to face
the fact that it also bears responsibility for the
situation. Macroeconomic mismanagement (including
deficit spending, a grossly overvalued currency,
multiple exchange rates, and unrealistic price
controls), a violent and chaotic land redistribution
program that has badly damaged the nation's agricultural
sector, and a disregard for the rule of law that has

driven foreign investment away, have all played a substantial role in creating conditions under which more than half of all Zimbabweans need food aid.

6) The United States will not politicize its food assistance to Zimbabwe. In spite of our serious concerns about the actions and policies of the Zimbabwean government, we will not abandon the people of Zimbabwe at this time of need.

7) We are working closely with the World Food Program and our bilateral NGO partners to make sure that the food we provide is distributed on a non-partisan basis.

8) The food crisis will also significantly aggravate the health conditions for people who are HIV positive and people living with AIDS. Zimbabwe is at the epicenter of the epidemic with the second highest HIV prevalence in the world - 35%. It is estimated that over 2,000 people a week are dying from complications due to AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Background on the Media:

15. (U) The Zimbabwean media are deeply polarized. The privately owned media are generally critical of the Government of Zimbabwe and sympathetic to U.S. policy and programs in Zimbabwe. The state-owned media are slavishly pro-Government and reflect the GOZ's distrust of the West. Both media camps will distort stories to reflect their points of view, but distortions in the private media are generally less extreme. Zimbabwean journalists from both camps are polite and not terribly aggressive. International media will also be present and will be important for re-broadcast into Zimbabwe as well as for the international audience. Specifically, we expect representatives from the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France Presse, Voice of America, the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC), the Times of London and the Guardian to be present.

16. (U) The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) has deliberately and successfully limited media freedom and the flow of information into and out of Zimbabwe. The majority of Zimbabweans must rely on heavily propagandistic government media for news and analysis of local and international events. The flow of news out of Zimbabwe has been restricted through the expulsion of once-resident foreign journalists and refusals to grant visas to international journalists wishing to visit.

17. (U) Radio is the most influential medium in Zimbabwe. The GoZ has a monopoly on local broadcast media and they offer only unrelenting pro-government propaganda. One independent broadcaster, Voice of the People, maintained offices in Zimbabwe and provided news and information via Dutch short wave facilities until its Harare office was completely destroyed by a sophisticated firebombing in late August 2002. Another short wave broadcaster, Short Wave Radio Africa, provides news and information from studios in the United Kingdom. Anecdotal information indicates that short wave broadcasters have only small audiences.

18. (U) Urban Zimbabweans have access to a courageous independent press consisting of one daily and three weeklies (the Daily News, Financial Gazette, Zimbabwe Independent, and the Standard). Prices, logistical challenges, and the fact that pro-government forces have banned the distribution of independent newspapers in rural areas means that most rural Zimbabweans (60% of the population) have no access to these publications. The independent press is under steady pressure from the GoZ and pro-government forces. Arrests of editors and reporters are common and the Daily News has twice been bombed, most recently in January 2001 in a sophisticated attack that completely destroyed the paper's presses. No arrests have been made. The Daily News recently replaced its presses. A new media registration law, to come into force later this year, is likely to result in increased arrests and harassment of journalists working for the independent press.

19. (U) The GoZ owns and exercises tight editorial control over two dailies and three weeklies (the Herald, Chronicle, Sunday Mail, Sunday News and Manica Post). Although the circulation of these papers has seen a steady decline, they are generally the only newspapers available in rural Zimbabwe. There is a distinct double standard in the application of media control laws to the independent and government-owned media.

10. (U) Over the last 18 months, non-Zimbabweans working for the BBC, Agence France Presse, the Mail and Guardian (South Africa) and other international media have been forced to leave the country. BBC has explicitly been banned. The new media registration law is likely to result in the closure of the Associated Press, Reuters and AFP bureaus in Zimbabwe, all currently staffed by Zimbabwean citizens. The GoZ routinely denies visas to journalists who openly apply to visit the country for reporting purposes.

Questions & Answers:

1. Question:

What do you see as the critical challenges the GOZ and donors face in dealing with the humanitarian crisis?

Answer:

One of the biggest challenges being faced right now is NGO capacity to efficiently and effectively distribute food aid. The World Food Program (WFP) needs to increase the number of NGOs who can deliver food aid and, in this regard, the GOZ must expeditiously review and process NGO registration applications to improve WFP's ability to distribute food to vulnerable Zimbabweans. The second challenge relates to the amount of available food. The latest Vulnerability Assessment indicates that the number of people in need of food assistance in Zimbabwe has increased from 6 million to 6.7 million; the amount of food aid requested has risen to 486,000 mt from the initial requested amount of 453,000 mt. The GOZ has also committed itself to import at least 650,000 mt. It is critical that these food requirements be met. Otherwise, we will experience a severe food gap and the situation will deteriorate rapidly.

2. Question:

What is the effect U.S. "sanctions" (under the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act) against Zimbabwe on the U.S. program to respond to the humanitarian crisis?

Answer:

The United States Government is committed to providing food assistance to help the most needy affected by the food crisis in Zimbabwe. We do so, however, with our eyes open to the fact the Government of Zimbabwe bears much of a responsibility for the growing humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe and the region.

Feel free to defer the remaining part of the answer to Ambassador Sullivan

The Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) is not a sanctions bill. It is a set of incentives designed, as the New York Times reported, to "lure Zimbabwe back to democracy." The bill offers US\$26 million (Z\$1.4 billion at the official exchange rate) to support land reform, basic human rights and economic development. To gain this support, the Government of Zimbabwe was asked to restore the rule of law; create conditions conducive to free and fair presidential elections; and make a commitment to an equitable, legal and transparent land reform program inter alia.

Since the Government of Zimbabwe chose not to accept ZDERA's recommendations, in February 2002 President Bush implemented targeted measures against a number of selected Zimbabwean officials. These measures include travel and financial restrictions. These measures do not include any actions to hurt the people of Zimbabwe. U.S. Government programs, including humanitarian food donations, the Ambassador's Self-Help Program, HIV/Aids prevention and treatment efforts, and educational and cultural programs, remain intact.

3. Question:

Will the U.S. sanctions against Zimbabwe result in the termination of the USAID development program?

Answer:

Feel free to defer this to Ambassador Sullivan.

Again, I note that ZDERA does not impose any broad-based sanctions against the people of Zimbabwe. Rather, it targets senior members of the government of Robert Mugabe and other Zimbabwean nationals who formulate, implement or benefit from policies that undermine or

injure Zimbabwean democratic institutions. ZDERA also affects persons who, through their business dealings with Zimbabwean government officials, derive significant financial benefits from policies that undermine or injure Zimbabwe's democratic institutions. Spouses of affected persons also face travel restrictions.

The U.S. Government remains committed to assisting the people of Zimbabwe in their hour of need and will not curtail humanitarian assistance as a result of ZDERA.

14. Question:

What is the USG's position regarding allegations of partisanship or political manipulation in the distribution of food?

Answer:

The United States condemns the political manipulation of food aid. Although to the best of our knowledge there has been no interference with USG-donated food, many credible reports exist of politicization of GOZ-supplied food. We are deeply concerned about such allegations and urge the Government of Zimbabwe to work collaboratively with the UN and the international community to assure that all food is distributed in an impartial and transparent manner.

15. Question:

Why is the U.S. providing biotech food to Zimbabwe and what effect will this have on the USG's ability to respond to the humanitarian crisis? Why can't the U.S. simply sign the GM certificates requested by the Government of Zimbabwe? The USG keeps saying that "there is no evidence that biotech food is harmful," but that is not the same as saying that biotech food is guaranteed to be safe. The issues of transgenic mutation and unintended side effects do not seem completely resolved. Why can't the US avoid these concerns by providing non-biotech maize, or providing money so that relief agencies can buy non-biotech maize from other sources?

Answer:

To begin with, we are very pleased that the Government of Zimbabwe and WFP have worked out an arrangement for the acceptance of the first shipment of whole kernel biotech maize. We urge that this agreement be followed quickly by others to accept all the food that we are prepared to donate to alleviate the food crisis in Zimbabwe. We believe this arrangement recognizes that the food provided by the U.S. to Zimbabwe is the same as that consumed by Americans. Biotech crops are subject to a rigorous safety review by the USDA, FDA, and EPA. The food is eaten by millions of Americans and to date no evidence has shown any negative health implications. This has been stated categorically by the WHO and WFP. Countries all over the world, including South Africa, China and Brazil, produce biotech food. This advanced technology has helped make seeds more resistant to such ravages as pests and drought, and holds great promise for increased agricultural productivity in Africa.

16. Question:

What is the U.S. position on the causes of the current food crisis in Zimbabwe? What should the GOZ be doing to address the crisis?

Answer:

The food crisis in Zimbabwe is highly complex and multifaceted. Although the regional drought has undoubtedly been a real factor in the food shortages in Zimbabwe, the situation has been greatly exacerbated by the policies and actions of the Government of Zimbabwe. Shortfalls in agricultural production in Zimbabwe -- due in very large measure to government-sponsored, chaotic, and often violent seizures of commercial farms and failed economic policies -- are having a direct impact on food availability and prices throughout the region. Other counterproductive Government of Zimbabwe policies -- such as the GMB monopoly on grain imports, price controls and unrealistic exchange rates -- have hamstrung the private sector and contributed to the food crisis. Foreign exchange shortages -- themselves a result of counterproductive government policies -- also limit Zimbabwe's ability to procure and import food and essential agricultural commodities. All of these issues also affect Zimbabwe's ability to resume agricultural production and, hence, mitigate the crisis.

The United States Government will continue to provide

food assistance to help the most needy affected by the food crisis in Zimbabwe, but we do so with our eyes open to the fact that the Government of Zimbabwe bears much of the responsibility for the growing humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe and the region. The GOZ urgently needs to address the policy problems that have substantially contributed to this crisis, carry through on its commitment to import food and distribute food in an equitable and transparent manner with need as the only criterion.

17. Question:

How much has the U.S. given in food assistance to Zimbabwe? Why is the USG doing so much to provide food to Zimbabwe even as it criticizes the GOZ so harshly? Don't you think that your food assistance may be helping the government of Robert Mugabe to remain in power?

Answer:

To date, the U.S. has approved the provision of 106,630 MTs of food assistance (valued at US\$56 million) to Zimbabwe (approximately 43,000MT has arrived in country to date). Within the southern African region, Zimbabwe is the country that is most severely affected by the current food crisis. The people and government of the United States are strongly committed to providing substantial resources to Zimbabwe to respond to this crisis. Yes, the GOZ bears much of the responsibility for the crisis, but we will not abandon the Zimbabweans who are suffering because of the actions of their government.

18. Question:

What is the U.S. position on land reform in Zimbabwe and why hasn't the U.S. lived up to its commitments to support land reform made at the Lancaster House negotiations in 1979 and the 1998 donors' conference?

Answer:

The U.S. believes that land reform in Zimbabwe should be implemented in transparent, equitable and consultative manner in accordance with the rule of law. That means it should be done without the illegal occupation of farms, violence, or the displacement of farm laborers. The U.S. did not commit, at the Lancaster House negotiations or otherwise, to provide funds for the purchase of land. Since 1980, however, we have provided millions of dollars of assistance to the agricultural sector, including funding for Zimbabwe to benefit from the expertise of the University of Wisconsin's Land Tenure Center, which is widely recognized as the preeminent center of expertise in land reform from its 30 years of work throughout the world. The USG also committed at the 1998 Donors' Conference to support a transparent, sustainable and lawfully executed land redistribution program; the GOZ instead decided to carry out a land redistribution program in a manner which violated every one of these principles.

19. Question:

What support is the USG/USAID providing to Zimbabwean civil society, especially those involved in promoting democratic values?

Answer:

Feel free to defer to Ambassador Sullivan.

In 1998, we entered into a grant agreement with Government of Zimbabwe that established a program to support Zimbabwean civil society. A big component of this program involves finding ways to improve dialogue between Parliament and civil society.

10. Question:

What is your response to rumors that the Government of Zimbabwe is preparing new legislation to enable it to have greater influence on the operations of PVOs?

Answer:

I have not seen the new legislation that you are referring to and, therefore, I cannot comment on it. Having said that, in general we believe it is important for the Government of Zimbabwe to create an environment in which NGOs can effectively carry out their critical roles as part of civil society, including participating in the distribution of emergency assistance during the current humanitarian crisis. We all know the tremendously helpful roles that NGO's, such as World Vision, Care, CRS and many others, have played here in

Zimbabwe in delivering food assistance, working on health and HIV-AIDS projects and many other areas. We certainly would hope that the GOZ not deal with NGO's as an enemy to to be hamstrung but as a key support to the Zimbabwean people. SULLIVAN